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ABSTRACT

To improve the teaching of writing in public schools, pre-service teachers should be trained in the theories and practice of composition and rhetoric through new courses in rhetoric, regardless of the teacher's subject area. Although the academic discipline of composition studies is now established, many public school teachers are not familiar with the fundamental works in this area. To address this deficit, an undergraduate course in rhetoric--"Current Methods of Teaching Writing," for example--might be required of all students in teacher-certification programs, introducing them to alternatives to the traditional rhetoric instruction. Such a course would provide frequent writing opportunities, reflect contemporary rhetoric, provide a framework for students to articulate their understanding of that paradigm, and put into practice its principles in both teaching and research. It would also incorporate research on the writing process, problem-solving, a systems analysis approach to error, emphasis on cognitive development instead of surface detail, and an appreciation of shifting linguistic registers when the purpose, audience, and occasion demand. For schools to begin teaching writing in all courses and in all grades, English departments and education departments need to prepare writing teachers for every classroom by teaching their students to write. (Sixty-one references are appended.) (MM)

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New Directions for Teacher Training:

Preparing Writing Teachers for Every Classroom

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Introduction

An undergraduate in my course, "Introduction to Composition Theory," came to my office at a large state university about mid-term a few semesters ago to discuss some conflicting information about teaching English in the public schools. She had been reading Murray's new edition of A Writer Teaches Writing (Murray, 1985) and some essays on writing evaluation from Evaluating Writing (Cooper & Odell, 1977) for my class and made the mistake of volunteering to share that information in two of her teacher-education courses, both offered in another college at this university. When my student suggested in her "methods" class that students should write frequently in the public schools, her instructor publicly and flatly denounced the practice of teaching writing by having students write because "no one can keep up with the paper load or grade papers objectively."

Undaunted, when asked about evaluation--this time by her tests and measurements professor--my student offered the possibility of giving essay exams and writing assignments in all courses. Her instructor replied, and this is no exaggeration: "Essays and essay exams are invalid, Ms. _____.

Student progress in all courses, including English, must be evaluated by objective tests."

Our profession faces a serious problem that is not limited to current battles along discipline lines within English departments. The conflict crosses departmental lines and pits schools of education against departments of English in a new battle for the minds of prospective and practicing teachers.

Calls for new directions in teacher education are frequently iterated (Oftedahl, 1985) or reiterated (Farrell, 1985), some with general recommendations for change, others with more specific methods of teaching methods courses. This paper offers suggestions for change to improve the teaching of writing in public schools to make school, as Henry Giroux (1984) states it, meaningful, critical, and emancipatory. The approach suggested here is to train pre-service teachers in the theories and practice of composition and rhetoric through new courses in rhetoric, regardless of the teacher's subject area. This paper first reviews the recent literature in writing theory and instruction and then offers a rationale for the development of a specific methods course in the teaching of writing--for all teachers, regardless of teaching field.

Background

For about two decades, writing researchers have advocated a writing-as-process approach to teaching writing, within what Maxine Hairston calls the new paradigm emerging from a revolution in teaching writing (Hairston, 1982). This new paradigm, dubbed the New Rhetoric by Steinmann (1967) and others, is supported by a growing body of literature, now widely anthologized (Tate & Corbett, 1970; Tate & Corbett, 1981; Donovan & McClelland, 1980; Tate, 1976; Cooper & Odell, 1978; Kroll & Vann, 1981; Myers & Gray, 1983; R. Graves, 1976, 1984; Winterowd, 1975). While universal agreement on all of the characteristics of the new rhetoric is yet to be reached, the new rhetoric, also known as contemporary rhetoric, is clearly a reaction against the current-traditional rhetoric pedagogies; that is, its proponents see writing as a process rather than writing as a product. This reaction has grown, and composition studies is now an established academic discipline, as evidenced by a number of well-established journals in the field (Conners, 1984). Even so, many teachers in public school systems--and many university professors--are not familiar with the works fundamental to composition studies.

Current-traditional rhetoric

Maxine Hairston's article in the February 1982 issue of College Composition and Communication provides a background to the

tenants of current-traditional rhetoric and the traits of contemporary rhetoric. She cites Richard Young's chapter, "Paradigms and Problems: Needed Research in Rhetorical Invention," from the 1978 Cooper and Odell anthology, Research on Composing: Points of Departure, and James Berlin and Robert Inkster's (1980) article in Freshman English News in her presentation of identifiable characteristics of current-traditional rhetoric. Current-traditional rhetoric emphasizes the composed product rather than the intellectual processes required for creating the product and classifies all discourse into one of four rhetorical patterns: description, narration, exposition, and argument. Current-traditional rhetoric has a strong concern for arrangement, usage, and style, as well as a pre-occupation with the informal essay and the research paper. Furthermore, current-traditional rhetoric asserts that writing cannot be taught (Young, 1978). Expository writing is emphasized within the current-traditional paradigm, often to the exclusion of other forms of discourse. Current-traditional rhetoric ignores the rhetorical context of the writing act, neglects invention, and holds style as the most important element in writing (Berlin & Inkster, 1980). Hairston adds that current-traditional rhetoric holds that writers have no need for invention techniques because they know what they are going to write before they begin to write, that composing is

linear act, progressing from pre-writing to writing to rewriting, and that teaching editing for surface detail is the same as teaching writing (Hairston, 1982). A major characteristic of current-traditional rhetoric is that its underlying theories are based on assumption and tradition, not on research findings.

Teachers of all disciplines educated under the tenents of current-traditional rhetoric remain ignorant or skeptical of pedagogies based on more informed views of language. Their uninformed views of language lead to inadequate, often harmful, composition instruction (Strickland, 1984) because writing is so often confined to English classes, even in schools where English and language arts instructors are better informed.

A Contemporary Rhetoric

The theories underlying contemporary rhetoric are research-based, viewing writing as a mental process (D'Angelo, 1977) and reflecting the features of contemporary rhetoric as listed by Hairston (1982). That is, contemporary rhetoric focuses on the writing process, teaches strategies for invention, is rhetorically based, bases evaluation on the writer's intention, views writing as a recursive process, views writing as an activity that involves the intuitive and non-rational, emphasizes writing as a way of learning, includes a variety of modes, is informed by other

disciplines, views writing as a disciplined activity, is based on linguistic research and research into the composing process, and stresses that writing teachers should be writers (Hairston, 1982).

In reflecting the features of contemporary rhetoric, the theories informing the pedagogies of contemporary rhetoric reject the product-centered pedagogies of current-traditional rhetoric and embrace a cognitive process, student-centered approach to teaching writing. Contemporary rhetoric is a means of maintaining the highest intellectual standards while advancing the theory that writing is not only a mode of communication, but also a mode of learning. While two courses are not adequate for the transformation of teaching processes, institutions of higher learning must develop at least two courses for present and future public school teachers and college professors. My suggestions for the improvement of writing instruction begin with an undergraduate course and a discussion of rhetorical theory important to any course in writing or the teaching of writing, proceed through a description of a graduate course, and end with suggestions for research in the eighties.

A Required Course in Teaching Writing

An undergraduate course in rhetoric, "Current Methods of Teaching Writing," for example, might be required of all students

in teacher-certification programs. Such a course would introduce students to alternatives to the current-traditional rhetoric instruction they received throughout their education, and the introduction would be on at least three fronts: model, book, and mirror.

Gene Krupa's (1982) article in College Composition and Communication articulates a model program for teaching composition teachers how to teach composition, a program incorporating current cross-disciplinary research findings about the nature of literacy and an understanding of rhetoric with a classroom model for teaching writing and ample opportunity to view one's own teaching. Krupa's suggestions include a course that teaches how to teach writing by teaching writing, showing "the actions, reactions, and interactions that should take place in a writing class" (p. 442). Students in writing classes and in writing theory classes should write frequently, not simply as end of the semester writing assignments. Thus, all teachers (and especially teachers of writing) become writers, a transformation considered important by Hartwell (1982), Murray (1968, 1982), Smith (1981b), and others, including Jim Gray, the designer of the National Writing Project.

Another aspect of modeling in a course in rhetoric for all teachers is the concept that the writing teacher should never be the center of attention (Collins & Moran, 1982); therefore, the

instructor should become a catalyst in an environment of inquiry, resisting the desire to be at the center of the stage. The instructor should instead suggest readings, write with the students and share that writing with them, open to their comments and criticism. To guide the course, the instructor should provide the benefit of experience and training--but should avoid lecturing--by discussing the implications of the readings and relevant research, investigating theories and approaches that may or may not work in the classroom, and discussing the reasons for the successes and failures of different methods. A course in the teaching of writing should include daily writing, and the instructor should write with the students. As model, the instructor should become the antithesis of the current-traditional rhetorician in an effort to show the students, and not just tell them, that alternatives to the role model they have encountered most of their lives do exist. It is clear that students learn what teachers demonstrate even when the teacher is unaware of what she demonstrates (Smith 1981a).

Without a clear understanding of the theories that inform a particular model of teaching, the imitator of the model is simply play-acting on a stage within the narrow lines of an unchanging script. At best, the imitator is a character actor, adept a changing characters when different demands present themselves,

lecturing on occasion, conferencing when time permits, editing with some students, lending support to others. But if all of this activity is performed without strong theoretical underpinning, the result is conceptually bare, an impoverished view of language and the writing process. So, in addition to modeling, an adequate program for the preparation of writing teachers conveys knowledge: "knowing what to teach, knowing teaching methods, knowing why one has chosen one's goals, strategies, and procedures" (Krupa, 1982, p. 442). Indeed, what the teacher knows is more important than was once thought (Shuy, 1981b), and I believe that people who teach writing need to know the major theories underlying composition teaching practices, as outlined by Berlin (1982) and others.

Background knowledge in style might be provided by a study of the basics of Christensen (1963) sentence rhetoric, sentence combining research (Strong, 1973; Daiker, Kerek & Morenberg, 1979), voice (Gibson, 1966), and syntactic maturity (Hunt, 1977). Invention pedagogies might be supported by research and theory in tagmemic heuristics (Young, Becker & Pike, 1970), the Burke Pentad (1969), discovery through questioning, freewriting, and collaborative composing. Invention pedagogies should be taught, as indicated by the work of Linda Flower and John Hayes in problem-solving (Flower, 1981; Flower & Hayes, 1977), defining the

rhetorical problem (Flower & Hayes, 1980), and the cognitive processes involved in writing. Arrangement pedagogies might receive support from reading research (Meyer, Brandt & Bluth, 1980; Meyer, 1982), schema theory (Anderson, 1978), and text processing from cognitive psychology (Clark & Clark, 1977), and Hartwell (1979, 1982). The Roger Garrison (1973) and Donald Murray (1968; 1982) conferencing techniques might be offered as effective techniques for teaching invention, arrangement, and style.

Improving schools through the teaching of writing requires that the writing process be seen as a recursive, spiraling, cognitive process, and that future teachers--and inservice teachers--be encouraged to read widely in a number of related disciplines to develop their awareness of the determinants of literacy. Teachers and researchers must acknowledge the legitimacy of alternate world views (Emig, 1982), so teachers need many opportunities to learn that alternatives in the teaching of writing exist. Some alternatives are based on theories that hold that tradition and the written product are of utmost importance, some on a wide range of philosophical foundations supporting that communication is the greatest good, and some on changing views of reality and that discovering or shaping truth is of primary importance.

Thus, an undergraduate course in rhetoric would provide frequent writing opportunities, reflect contemporary rhetoric and provide a framework for students to articulate their understanding of that paradigm, and put into practice its principles in both teaching and research. It would also incorporate research on the writing process, problem-solving, a systems analysis approach to error, an emphasis on cognitive development instead of surface detail considerations, and an appreciation of shifting linguistic registers when the purpose, audience, and occasion demand. Writing pedagogies of contemporary rhetoricians draw heavily from Mina Shaughnessy's (1977) Errors and Expectations, Janet Emig's (1971) The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders, Kasden and Heober's (1980) Basic Writing: A Collection of Essays for Teachers, Researchers, and Administrators, and Kroll and Vann's (1981) Exploring Speaking-Writing Relationships, and many other works from a variety of disciplines. Teachers and researchers in the grapple with the nature and transmission of literacy as presented in these major works and collections of essays.

Conclusion

Improvements in the teaching of writing, signalled by renewed efforts to improve the design of writing assignments (Ruth & Murphy, 1984; Purves, et al, 1984) or redesign composition courses

(L. Smith, 1984) requires the continuation of research into the composing process --at an increasing level of support--if the profession is to advance beyond current pedagogies. Donald Graves (1981) has called for research into the context of the writing episode and "the types of left-right brain activity" in a child's writing process (p. 200). Janet Emig (1982) has said that the discipline needs a new, non-experimental inquiry paradigm to replace the positivistic paradigm now holding sway over much of the research. A lot of literacy research, although well-intended, is simplistic and wrong-headed (Hartwell, 1984); therefore, additional investigation of the effectiveness of different teaching methods is in order, and individualized instruction may be one answer (Roberts, 1985). Meanwhile, the profession continues to grapple with the complex question of the value of grammar instruction (Chomsky, 1984; Davis, 1984; Haynes, 1978; Hartwell, 1985), with some people still adhering to the out-moded assumption that people learn language best in small, compartmentalized bits.

The profession can afford further compartmentalizing of neither language learning nor school curricula. Thus, for writing instruction to improve in the next five to ten years, teachers and researchers must examine the assumptions underlying current literacy teaching and research practices (Harste, Woodward &

Burke, 1984). They must look at language and literacy holistically (Shuy, 1981a) and retrain not only English and language arts teachers, but all people involved in education, teachers of all disciplines, administrators, school board members, and parents. Above all, schools must begin teaching writing in all courses and in all grades, and all students from kindergarten through graduate school must write daily to improve their writing. To accomplish that goal, English departments and education departments must prepare writing teachers for every classroom by teaching their students to write.

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